

Karla Black Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (GoMA)
20 April – 24 June 2012

Delicacy and discipline define Karla Black's latest exhibition in association with Glasgow International Festival of Art with the installation of two significant new works in GoMA's barrel vaulted grand hall. Following major presentations of her work at the Venice Biennale and Turner Prize exhibition at the Baltic, Gateshead in 2011, Black has created a powerful statement of materiality and transformation, incorporating all our traditions of seeing; drawing, painting and performance in her sculptural installations.

Loose, raw materials remade in fluid states of formal structure and disintegration are an essential part of the psychological architecture of Black's work. *Empty Now and Will Attach* (2012) creates illuminating relationships between sculpture, audience and surrounding environment, incorporating the natural light, earthy tonality and gilded hues inspired by GoMA's ornate ground floor interior. The formal structure of Neo Classical pillars contain and inform marks of human intervention in the gallery space. With visitors kept back from the fragile edges of the central work, directed to move clockwise in restricted numbers and advised of potential respiratory risk, the immediate physical touch response is repressed. Strangely mental absorption in the material presence of the work is heightened by this habitat of cultural restraint.

Enclosed by institutional pillars *Empty Now* dominates the inner ground of the central hall. Black's meticulous construction of 16 tonnes of raw sawdust is breath taking; a sculpture of monumental presence and association, coupled with the artist's playful articulation of carved objects on an intimate scale. Seemingly held together only by fragile particles of itself the installation is immediately tactile; evidence of touch in the powdery surface excavations creates a feeling of human habitation of the work in thought and mark. The artist's use of materials (Pine, spruce, teak, maple, yew, oak, balsa wood, balsa foam, eye shadow) seemingly present the viewer with a layer caked strata of earth, an archaeological dig into the collective mind.

Out of this painstaking construction dug out hollows reveal unexpected treasures, clustered groupings of objects playfully disinterred from the dominant mass. The construction of many of these objects; bronze whittled columns and naïve carving of cloud like elements of a child's building set allude to early stages of human development and evoke the earliest forms of Art as ritual, a visual means of understanding the world. Evidence of natural destruction in powdery shaved fragments of sawdust scattered on the gallery floor give these sculptural offerings human presence and vulnerability in physical form.

Similarly *Will Attach* 2012 presents itself as an idea materially manifest in exuberantly looped garlands of cellophane, paint, body wash, shampoo, gel bronzers, lip gloss and nail varnish suspended from the ceiling by cello tape. Rows of tree like pillars hold these gestural forms aloft, glinting cellophane gently shifting with the air flow. On this transparent ground earthy golden hues; smears of paint, makeup and toiletries, echo the naturalised palette of interior decoration. Black frees pictorial and painterly elements such as form, colour and composition, allowing them to be experienced with a physicality of scale that is transformative. The presence of raw pigment on cellophane at eye height, layered tonality of sawdust and excavated drawn marks compellingly maintain the presence of a human hand within the work. Mindful deliberation is brought into dialogue with raw matter to encompass the entire space, floor to canopy in a vibrant statement of our most basic human drives.

Black's sculptural work presents itself resoundingly as a force in the world rather than a series of art objects, concerning itself neither with absolute meaning via traditional narrative nor with the creation of an art object immortalising its maker. Art becomes an imaginative, cerebral space through direct experience of the work and its physical properties, a

behavioural experiment creating optimum conditions for a shift in perception to occur. The entire work is an act of becoming, an expression of our deepest creative drives, intimately concerned with the purpose and definition of Art as an aspirational, civilizing force in the world. What is most extraordinary about this latest work is its capacity to visually translate the physical experience of raw materials reformed and redefined from abstraction to conscious awareness of a human mind touching and perceiving the work.

Georgina Coburn